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**MAY IS HEPATITIS AWARENESS MONTH**  
*Over 300,000 Floridians are infected With Hepatitis C*

**TALLAHASSEE** – The Florida Department of Health (DOH) recognizes May as Hepatitis Awareness Month. Hepatitis A, B and C are the most common types of viral hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) in the United States. Symptoms of hepatitis include nausea, fever, weakness, loss of appetite and jaundice.

“Hepatitis A remains the second most frequently reported vaccine-preventable disease,” said DOH Secretary M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D. “We encourage adults who are at risk of infection to get vaccinated. We are seeing a slow decline in rates of hepatitis A and B. However, there are many Floridians who still need the protection of hepatitis vaccines. Last year, Florida had 270 cases of hepatitis A and 452 cases of acute hepatitis B.”

According to Dr. François, a total of 64,930 doses of hepatitis A vaccine and 117,226 doses of hepatitis B vaccine were given to Florida’s adult residents at increased risk for infection between January 2001 and December 2005.

Between January 2001 and June 2005, approximately 112,000 Florida residents were tested for hepatitis B and C through public health programs. Results showed that 6.4 percent were infected with hepatitis C, and 8.1 percent were previously infected with hepatitis B. Without testing, these Floridians would not have known about their infections, and therefore would not have been able to take steps to keep themselves and others as healthy as possible.

DOH’s Hepatitis Program promotes educational and prevention activities, including free hepatitis A and B vaccines and free laboratory testing for hepatitis B and C for adults at increased risk for infection or the serious consequences of infection. DOH encourages all Floridians to contact their nearest county health department (CHD) about free screening and vaccinations for hepatitis.

Almost four million Americans and over 300,000 Floridians are infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis C is referred to as the ‘*silent epidemic*’ because most people have no symptoms and do not know they are infected. The disease often lies undetected for 20-30 years and is a leading cause of liver cirrhosis and liver failure.

HCV is usually spread through contact with blood containing the virus. You might have been exposed to hepatitis C by:

- Receiving a transfusion of blood or blood products before 1992;
- Sharing needles to inject drugs (even once, many years ago);
- Receiving a tattoo or having a body part pierced with an unsterilized needle;
- Accidental sticks with used needles or other accidental exposure to blood;
- Sharing razors, nail clippers, scissors, or toothbrushes; and
- Being born to a mother with HCV.

All people infected with HCV should be vaccinated for hepatitis A (HAV) and hepatitis B (HBV) because both of these viruses can cause further liver damage. Hepatitis A is transmitted by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated with human waste (feces). Hepatitis B is spread by having contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person, including sexual contact.

DOH promotes and protects the health and safety of all people in Florida through the delivery of quality public health services and the promotion of health care standards. For more information about viral hepatitis, or visit [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us) and select Hepatitis from the pull down menu or contact your local county health department (CHD).

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